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Talbot, Gerald "Gerry" oral history interview

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Interview with Gerald “Gerry” Talbot by Jeremy Robitaille

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Talbot, Gerald “Gerry”

Interviewer

Robitaille, Jeremy

Date

June 7, 2001

Place

Portland, Maine

ID Number

MOH 275

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Biographical Note

Gerald “Gerry” Talbot was born on October 28, 1931 in Bangor, Maine and attended Bangor High School. He worked as a chef at the Bangor House, and then joined the Army for three years. He later worked in the Portland Community Center, and for the Portland Gannett newspapers. He was elected president of the Portland, Maine NAACP in 1964, and also served as vice president of the New England NAACP. He served three terms in the Maine House of Representatives and has been a member of the Board of Visitors at the Edmund Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: the Vietnam War; Maine Legislature; ethnic diversity in Maine; the Great Depression; Civil Rights movement; race relations in Maine; and the NAACP.

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Jeremy Robitaille: All right. The date is June 7th, 2001, and we are at the home of Gerald Talbot at 132 Glenwood Avenue in Portland, Maine, and interviewing is Jeremy Robitaille. All right, Mr. Talbot, to start out, could you please state your full name and spell it for the record.

Gerald Talbot: My full name is Gerald E. Talbot, T-A-L-B-O-T. My first name is Gerald, G-E-R-A-L-D.

JR: Excellent. And what is your date and place of birth?

GT: I was born October 28th, 1931 in Bangor, Maine.

JR: And what were your parents' names?

GT: My mother's name was Arvella Luella Talbot, and her maiden name was McIntyre, and my father's name was Wilmont Edgerton Talbot, they called him W. Edgerton Talbot.

JR: Could you spell those please, your mother's name especially?

GT: My mother's name was Arvella, A-R-V-E-L-L-A, and she was a McIntyre. She's from Fredericton, New Brunswick, or Canada, New Brunswick, Canada.

JR: Great. And your father?

GT: My father is W. Edgerton Talbot, and he was born in Bangor.

JR: Great, okay. And how did your parents, how did your father end up in Bangor?

GT: Well, my father was born in Bangor; his father was born in Bangor. And his father, and his father, in other words we go back a little bit, a few generations, they were born in, or they were from a place called Harlem. Now most people don't know where Harlem is, except for New York. But Harlem is just, was just on the other side of Augusta, Maine, and then in 1822, which is two years after statehood, they changed that and now it is known as China, Maine.

JR: Really? Okay. And how about your mother, how did she, how did her ancestors get to Fredericton, where were they from?

GT: Well most, you see, a lot of people in Fredericton, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, either got there through the Underground Railroad, through ships, you know, that kind of thing. And then either, you know, because as time went on moved back into Maine or stayed there. And that's why you will find most of the black generations, with Black relatives in Maine, are all relatives. And most of them, and I could go through names, but that's not important right now, most of the names are from Canada.

JR: Do you have any siblings?

GT: I have four daughters, Renee, Rachel, Regina, and Beth.

JR: How about any brothers or sisters?

GT: I don't have any. No, I thought you meant do they have any. No, I have one brother and

three sisters.

JR: And what are their names?

GT: Well, the oldest one is Elaine, it is now Elaine Brookes, she's in Detroit, Michigan. Then there is Beverly, Beverly lives in Bangor now. And then Robert, we all call him Butch, okay Robert Talbot, and he's now retired from the federal government. Now he lives in Bangor. And I have another sister, my younger sister which is Elizabeth, she lives in South Portland.

JR: Okay, excellent. What did your parents do, what were their occupations?

GT: My father was chef at the Bangor House in Bangor, and he worked there from, from what I know of, for thirty, about thirty-five, forty years, he was a chef there. And my grandfather worked there before him. And my mother worked as a housewife, as most people did, and she did some catering with my grandmother, and she also did some work for other people, people who had money and that kind of thing. Because you have to remember, or should remember really, that in those days it wasn't easy for a black family or a black mother or father to just get a job doing whatever they were occupied to do. But cooking was something that they could do and did, and did very well.

JR: What were your parents' religious views?

GT: They were Episcopalians.

JR: And how about their social and political views?

GT: They were, my father worked, my father worked, and, as far as I can remember, my father worked like from five in the morning until maybe ten o'clock at night. My mother was very involved, she was involved with the community center, she was involved, you know, with the black community. She was I guess you'd probably say active in a lot of different kinds, I mean with the YWCA, she in her later years drove a cerebral palsy bus in Bangor, because my youngest daughter, our Beth, had cerebral palsy, but she drove a bus for them. So she was more or less active.

JR: How did your parents involvement in the community, how did that influence you growing up, do you have a sense?

GT: I think they were very important to me. We lived in a, I would say, one of the biggest, I use the word black, communities, in the state. And we lived in that, but it was a very diverse neighborhood, you see, a lot of people, but at that time we didn't know what diversity means, we didn't know what it meant. It was made up of blacks, whites, Irish Americans, Catholics, and it was made up, and it taught me a lot. I cannot forget that, it just taught me a lot about neighborhoods, people, that kind of thing. And so, it was very good for my education.

JR: What can you say about the dynamic of the different ethnic groups, I guess, were there, was there much tension growing up that you can recall or . . . ?

GT: Well, it's kind of funny for me to say, or it's kind of a little bit awkward for me to say, because when you're growing up you don't know much that matters, you know, you're just trying to do a lot of things. You're trying to learn, you're trying to find out who's who, and you're trying to find, you know, as far as kids are concerned, you're trying to play ball, I did a lot of that. So you're trying to do a lot of things. But, as far as I know it was a good, very good neighborhood and it was well knit. I would go to somebody's house, you know, a white friend. I don't mean to be derogative when I say that, but when I, if I went to their house I'd stand out front and I'd holler, you know, and I'd say either, "Alan," or going to somebody else I'd say, "Pat." Their mother would come to the door and say, "Wait a minute, they're eating now. Have you eaten? If you haven't eaten, get in here." And I'd go in there and eat. If I had eaten they say, "Well come on in here, they'll be right out." That kind of thing. Or we played ball, well, we played baseball or whatever right out there in the street, and we had our gloves, and if for some reason and they were eating and I'd eaten, the gloves, baseball bats, whatever would be right in the hallway, and their mother would say, "Well, you know, take what you want," or we'd take what we, as long as we put them back. We'd go out in the street and we'd play, and we'd put them back.

But I think the most important thing about that was that I learned, and it's not something you can just say well I learned this, like you do in school, but there's something you were brought up with, I learned to have a lot of respect for people. You know, the older generation. I call them now the older generation, and the old generation, you learned to have respect for them, how they brought you up, how they, you know, how people behave or how kids behave. And then of course the, what they called the USO at that time, it was during the war, then became, the community center came along and we did that. And that was a center for us as Black people in Bangor because that's when things started to move along and we were getting old, and then we were starting to find out, wait a minute now, there's a number of things that aren't right in this society, you know, and we started finding that out. So that's, it's kind of uh age process.

JR: Do you remember any specific people growing up who really had an influence on you?

GT: Oh yes, I have lots, I had a lot of people that were really very instrumental insofar as that I looked up to. Now, you have to remember that probably they were a little older than I was, maybe even ten years older than I was. Or they were my age. But they were people that you look up to, that's part of a good society, that's part of a good neighborhood, you know. And I lost one. I shouldn't say I lost one, but he passed away just before Christmas in December, Reggie Clark, who was a big man but he always had a smile on his face, he was a boxer, he played all sports, football, basketball, baseball and track. I mean, he was just, and he drove a railroad engine. Of course, you know, it's hard to say nowadays, but he was an engineer. And, but he was somebody you could just look up to, you know. And Mr. Wise was another chef in Bangor that you could look, you know, quiet people but they were like statues. You know, and the Nelson family, I mean, I could just go on, because that was your neighborhood.

Let me give you an example. When I was small and my grandmother lived next door to me, nice house, but she lived next door, she was in the catering business. (*Unintelligible phrase*), he was an ex-chef, as I said before. And we would go next, because we would hear from, you know how you hear things from parents, you would hear that Aida and Queenie (?) Peters was coming

home. Now that meant that, they lived next door to my grandmother, but they taught down at Tuskegee, Alabama, they were teachers down there, went to school up here but they taught down there. And you found out through the ear that they were coming home, so you sat on that front lawn, waiting for them to come home. Because you knew, you knew a couple things, that they were going to drive around that corner in what seemed to be a huge black Cadillac, and they were coming home. And that just was, it was just the biggest thing going. And you didn't know what time they were coming home, so you just waited. Pretty soon, that car, and it seemed like the car was so long it took a long time for it to turn around that corner, and it came around that corner and Aida and Queenie (?), you know, the Peters, came home and it was just like, it was just like the sky opened up. Because you had to have people that you looked up to. And you did, yeah.

JR: That's great. What can you tell me about Bangor, growing up, like what about the community in general, like socially, economically, politically?

GT: Bangor, Bangor's like probably any community. Well, any good-size community in Maine. But Bangor was a, was hometown, Bangor was our home town. And we would go to, like every Sunday we'd go across the city to my mother's sister, or my aunt's house, and we had dinner over there. And of course they had Hancock Street. Now Hancock Street was like any town, it was a street where it was rough, it was a rough street, and we had relatives that lived on Hancock Street. But Bangor was a good community. And it had, the police force was a police who you knew a lot of the police officers because they were either relatives or people who lived in the neighborhood. Not black, but white, who lived in the neighborhood. And where we lived was, it was not right in the city but, you know, just outside the city limits. Not, you know, downtown, but it was like a farm. In other words, you'd get up in the morning, there were cows out back, horses out back, you'd go down maybe three houses, there was a farm, you know, like a farm, they had chickens and all of that, you know. And, so from that point on, you know, it was a good city. I still like Bangor, I still go back there, Bangor's my home town you know.

JR: Do you have recollections, or do you remember hearing stories about the Great Depression when you were a child, like how it affected Bangor or how it affected people you knew?

GT: Well, I think like a lot of kids, or like a lot of youngsters, I heard stories about it. But I never knew a lot about the Depression, except that, like even during the war years or before that, my father, we sat on a round table, like a lot of families sit, you know, the table was round, and we each had our place to sit down, and I sat beside my father. And if I left anything on that plate, whether it would be a crumb from my bread or the whatever, he'd tell me, "You got to eat that. There are people who are starving, people aren't eating, and you eat that." And I always had to, and I've learned, I learned and I've remembered it ever since, I have to clean off that plate, because that's what it was worth. So it was very good, and everything was, everything, I think, was, like at that time or generation was good. You know.

One of the things that I think I did learn about the city was the fact that, and you learn this as I stated before, as time goes on and you get a little bit older, was the fact that we did not have a black policeman, we did not have a black nurse, we did not have anybody, in other words, you know, that was there but it was kind of an underlying subculture that was there that as a child or

as a teenager or, you know, you didn't really understand until that starts coming to you little by little, and you put it in your mind, and it kind of stays there as you get a little bit older and you kind of, something's not right here, or something is just, I just can't put my finger on it, that kind of thing.

JR: Where did you attend elementary school?

GT: I attended elementary school in Bangor, I went to Hannibal Hamlin grammar school, I went to Lagen Street grammar school, and then I finally went to Bangor High School, and, believe it or not, I graduated.

JR: What can you recall of your experiences, like any stories or influential teachers or peers, about your days in school?

GT: Probably one of the most important people in my education, okay, and I can remember Mrs. Penney, I can remember Mrs. Burke and going through grammar school, and whatever. But probably one of the most important people that I can remember in education was a man named Mark Shed. Young man, okay, I think he just had graduated from the University of Maine in Orono. And I was in high school. Now, I had a hard time in high school because things were not, in other words, I think I am still under the impression that they just never offered me what I needed to have or wanted, or needed, okay.

And when I got to high school I was, I always played ball, football, basketball, baseball, always, did it always. And when I got to high school I started out doing that, and when I got to junior high school they found out that I had a small case of what they called epilepsy. Now, you know, epilepsy is when sometimes you just, it's like a light switch, it just turns off the light quick, and then you're back. I mean, you know, and you can be talking to somebody, they wouldn't even know that. And I was caught. I shouldn't say caught, they found out when I was playing football one time, so they cut me. Which means my senior year I did not play anything, even though I was capable and able, they wouldn't let me. I say they robbed me of that.

Now, here's where Mark Shed comes in. I sat there in school, looked out the window on a day like this and I'm saying, "I'm out of here, I don't want school any more, I quit." So I quit. And pretty soon, a week went by and my uncle said, "Wait a minute, you're going back to school. You got to go back to school, get an education." At that time you had to get a high school education. So I says, "Okay, I'm going back." Well, I went back to high school, and a couple days went by and I looked out the window, "Geez, it's beautiful out there, I'm out of here." And I was gone again. And then you know my aunt, and my grandmother came to me and says, "Look, wait a minute, you go back to school, Buddy, you got to get an education, and what you do when you get that education, I'll send you to barber school, I'll send you to barber school." And I went back. A couple days went by or, a week went by, and I'm saying, "Geez, it looks nice outside". I did that four times. Four times, I did that. Pretty soon Mark Shed caught me, and Mark Shed said, "Wait a minute, you come into this office, I want to talk to you." He was the assistant football coach, also, for JVs or whatever. And him and I sat, and he says, "You're going to graduate, you got to graduate from this high school because, you know," he give me a talking to. I went back to school and sure enough, from what he told me and what he was able

to, you know, from what I was able to take from him, on Friday the 13th, let me tell you this, Friday the 13th in 1952 I graduated from Bangor High School. For me it's unbelievable, but you know, I always remember that.

JR: So what did you do after high school?**GT:** After high school I went to work for the Bangor House with my father. I went to work for the Bangor House because you couldn't get a job driving a truck for the city, you couldn't get a job that was decent or that would pay your, you could earn a trade. That was something my father always taught me, was you've got to earn a trade. But I couldn't do that, but I could go to work where my father works at the Bangor House. And then at some point one of the other cooks at the Bangor House and I sort of got in a little disagreement over, you know, because I would go around whistling like, you know, you're a happy kid. "Stop your whistling, you sound like that machine over there that does the dishes." And that happened about two or three times, and finally I says, I says, "Dad, I'm going to see you later. I ain't staying, I ain't doing this, I ain't going to, you know, (*unintelligible phrase*)." And my father asked me where I was going, I says, "I'm going somewhere but I ain't going to tell you." In other words, I've got an education, I've got something, but I'm going to get something that's going to further my education and further my trade. So I moved, I left.

And then I said, I'm going to move to Portland, for two reasons. Well, I told myself for two reasons. Number one, while I played football for Bangor I found a, I met a young woman in Portland who was going to Portland High School, which is now still my wife, and I said, "Well, Portland's a bigger city and I can do a better job." So I left Bangor and moved to Portland. And without probably realizing I'm going to run into the same problems, you know, the color problems. But I moved to Portland and one of the things that I could do, and I'm glad I could, is that I could always get what I call my whites out, white hat, my white shirt, white pants, and I could cook. See, I could go anywhere and I could cook. And so I could always do that if I had to fall into that. And I've fallen into that a number of times, I've fallen into that.

And then what happened is in 1953, I was in Portland, and what I decided to do is, I was the only one, well, nobody in my immediate family, in my immediate family was in the service. This is during the Korean War and I'm saying, wait a minute, I says, I'm not going to grow up (?), up knowing that somebody will come back and say, you didn't do your duty or whatever. I says, I'm going in the service, I says, I'm going in these service, I'm going to do that. So I did, I joined the Marine Corps. But something else happened. I joined the Marine Corps, I tried to join the Marine Corps in Portland, and for some reason, I passed everything. But of course, as I said, and I can say this now, I was good in sports so I could do anything. But for some reason they took me, and one of the tests I had was a booklet, and in that booklet they have all kinds of little color pictures and they have a number in there. I didn't get any of them, and I didn't understand why I didn't get any of them. They finally told me, you're color blind. You're color blind. And by being color blind, you can't get in the service. Well, I didn't really realize, but I knew that getting in the Marine Corps wasn't the biggest thing for a black person to do, or being able to do. So I said, and then my attitude got up again, and I said, "I'm outta here, I'm going back to Bangor." And I went back to Bangor and I says, if I have to join the French Foreign Legion I'm going to do something, but I'm getting out of here, somehow I'm going to, you know, trying to do what's best. And I did, I went down to the Army, you know, the Army recruit station. I said, "How fast can you get me in?" and the guy says, "I'll have you in the Army in about a week." In

a week I was gone. So that's what happened. I spent three years in the Army.

JR: And, where were you stationed while you were in the Army?

GT: You really don't want to hear this.

JR: No?

GT: Well, I'm a little bit different than a lot of people. I went down to Fort Dix and did my basic training. From Fort Dix I went up to Fort Devons, which is the (*unintelligible phrase*). And one of the things I wanted to do was also do some traveling down south and find out what's going on down there, from what I was able to hear, what I was able to see, what I was able to communicate with other people at the community center that we used to go to like every day, every weekend. So that, but I was at Fort Dix. Fort Dix is in Boston, so I'm saying, "What am I doing at Fort Dix?" I mean Fort Devons, "What am I doing at Fort Devons?" So I was at Fort Devons, I says wait a minute, I can do something with this here. So I put in for Korea, I put in for Korea. Nothing happened. I put in for Korea twice, nothing happened. I decided, look, I ain't going nowhere, they're not going to do anything with me. So I got married, 1954 I got married, I married my wife Anita. Right? About a month later, even before that, they sent me overseas. And here's where I said you don't want to hear this. They sent me to a place called Tulle, Greenland, which is top of the North Pole. I mean, it is top of the North Pole. So top of the North Pole that when you do your six months, you come home for thirty days, I told them up there, "No, no, no, no. I'm going to do my year and then I'm going home because I'm not, if I go home for six months you ain't going to see me no more." So I did my year in Tulle, Greenland, and then I came home. Went right back to Fort Dix, and then I got discharged in 1956.

JR: In your time in the Army, I guess I just want to know your impression, or any experiences you had as far as considering that the Army had just been desegregated only a few years, like back in 1948. I don't know if you experienced any tensions from that in your experiences in the Army or - ?

GT: I experienced some of that at Fort Dix. They had barracks in fact right across from the house, but that barracks was mostly black. So that still was there to a certain extent. It took some while for that to work itself out. But yeah, I still felt some of that there, yeah.

JR: Okay. So what did you do after the Army?

GT: After the Army, 1956, I came back to Portland. But Portland in 1956 was almost the same thing. Almost the same way insofar as Blacks getting jobs and whatever. But I went to work at the what they I think used to call the Community Center and, not the Community Center, what did they call that. Well, I think it's the Community Center, for the city, and I went there on Free Street. And I was the fireman, which is what I did when I was in the service. I played ball, I played basketball for Fort Devons, but I was a fireman. And, but then, of course in those days what they had a furnace, so you had to keep the furnace going, and you also had to do the dusting and whatever. So I would keep the furnace going, bank it at night bank it at night, and then I'd go up early in the morning and I'd do my dusting, cleaning and all of that, and keep the

fires going. Especially in the winter, I'd keep the fires going. So I did that. Then I worked at, you know, a couple of jobs. I was trying to find a decent trade, trying to find one I can learn, you know, that kind of thing. And that's what I did.

JR: I've been told that you were employed by the Portland Gannett Papers?

GT: I was employed by the Guy Gannett Publishing Company, and I started there in 1966. I had worked as a printer, different shops, I had worked as a printer. I tried to get a job with the telephone company, and I went there on two different occasions, I went there to find a job because somebody said that, you know, you might be able to find, so I went there, took a test, was about halfway through that test, a guy came to me and he says, "Yup, it's all done." And I thought to myself, "It's all done? How can it be all done?" And he says, "You failed the test." But, he says, "If you want to take another test you have to wait six months." And I says, "My God," so I went to work for a printing company out in Falmouth, came back and took another test. It wasn't a quarter of the way through the test, okay, it wasn't a quarter away, he says, "You're all done." And I was like, it was unbelievable. And, "You failed." And as I walked out of there I says, "I know why I failed. Because I'm black." I know why I failed.

And I went to work, shortly after, went to work for the Guy Gannett newspaper companies, you know, I was working nights, and I went to a meeting. Now I'm starting to go to different meetings. I went to a meeting and there I met the same man who gave me a test. And I went to him and I'm saying, "I've got a job, I'm working. But I want to find out why I failed the test twice. Can you tell me?" He says, "Yeah," he says, "You got a big mouth." And you're active in the NAACP. And I was, I was elected president of the NAACP in 1964, and of course I just made sure that I made myself heard and I stood up for what I believed in. And, you know, that's not what he said, but he said, you know, you're very active in the NAACP and, he says, you got a big mouth, which proved to me why I didn't get that job. But I had that job with Guy Gannett Publishing Company, and I kept that until 1991 and I retired after twenty-five years.

JR: Okay, if we can go back to your involvement with the NAACP, how did you first get involved, like when and how? What were the circumstances?

GT: Well, I was working for Maine Printing Company at that time, running the press, I was running the press. And, all of a sudden Mr. Willis, the owner of the company, come in, he says, he hollered down, you know, "Gerry," he says, "Somebody here to see you." Yeah, okay. He says, Birger Johnson, Birger Johnson was associate minister at Woodford's Congregational Church. And he says, "He wants to see you for a minute." Well I says, "okay, have him come down." So I'm still running my press, I says, "Yeah, what can I do you for?" He says, "Look," he says, "what we'd like to do is we'd like to start a branch of the NAACP," and he says, but, and he says, "you seem to know a lot of people, you know, black people," he says, "you seem to know a lot of people. So we want to get some names of some people who you think can do the job, you know." I says, "Okay, I'll do what I can," I says, "if you come back in a couple of days I'll give it to you." Came back in a couple of days. So then a couple of days went by and Mr. Willis called down, he says there's a man here to see you again. I says, "Okay." He came down, and he says, "Gerry, how are you doing?" I says, I'm doing okay. I'm still running the press, right?" He says, "Yeah, how are you doing?" I says, "I'm doing okay." And he says, well we

finally found a name, he says thanks to me. And I says, whatever help I can be to you, I said, "Who's the name?" "You." I almost fell in the press. I'm saying, "Me?" You know, like, "What?" I says, "I can't do that. No, no, no, no, no, wait a minute, hold the phone." Well, Jesus, you know, we had to stop the press, and I'm saying, I've never done anything like this in my life, you know. So he says, now, and then, and now I know why he was a minister, because he talked me into it. "We'll do this, we'll support you, we'll do that."

And then things started to go, newspaper wise, in other words, you know, Gerry Talbot's running for this, and we've got this and this, you know how newspapers do that kind of thing. And there were a number of people saying, well, if they're going to do this, go to the newspaper and give them a story. I says, "Look, I'm not going to do anything." People who go to the meeting will elect who they want to elect. But he talked me into it and I says, "Look, I'll do the best I can." And I says, so we have a meeting and whatever. But that's how I got started.

JR: And when was that?

GT: That was 1964, that was May of 1964, can't forget it.

JR: Okay, and had you been involved with it before then?

GT: No. I think my mother had us when we were in Bangor, when I was there, I was a kid, I think my mother had as members, but I've never been involved insofar as being active and whatever, no, no.

JR: Okay. Is it true that when, in 1964 when you became president, is that when the state organization got affiliated with the national NAACP?

GT: No, well, whenever you become, whenever you receive your charter, you become a national member, you know, that's part of being a national member of NAACP, okay? But there was a chapter in Bangor, and there was a chapter in Lewiston. And a number of people from Portland would go up to Lewiston. And I think, I think it was the time when things were starting to really get involved, like in the south, in the '50s, '56, '57, '58, you know, were starting to move. And they had been involved, but I mean starting to move, and they moved their way right up into the state of Maine. And Portland, because a number of people had gotten together and said, we got to start something. And in fact, the black community here in Portland had met, I think it was either 1964, I think it was in the same year, but before that that got together and said, we got to do something, you know, we've got to start putting some things together. Because, you know, we've been here for a long time and very little had been done, and very little, I should say very little movement had been done that said we got to change everything. So that's one of the other things. And so that's how we got started, and it was May, I think it was May of 1964 we got started.

JR: And, what do you know about the, like the branch in Lewiston and Bangor, when did they, how long had they been around?

GT: They had been around, oh, they got started maybe about two years before we did, or a

year before we did, they got started. Because it was, as I said, it was an attitude that had moved its way up and things had to be done. And Bangor, probably not as much as Lewiston, but Bangor, had been feeling that pinch for a long time also because of Dow Air Force Base, because of air personnel that had been moving in here, you know, Black personnel, who couldn't find housing, who couldn't find part time jobs. And they were just going through some things that was telling us, you got to do something, or something has to be done. So that's how things started to move, and we were starting to move them.

JR: Okay. What did you actually do, like what activities did you do in like affiliation with the Maine NAACP? Like what specifically?

GT: It's a good question but there's one thing; it's everything. I mean everything. Let me go back. Once you become involved, okay, this is just my feeling, but once you become involved, even though you haven't been involved, once you become involved with something like that, you just take off. Not sometimes that you want to, but you just take off because that's your life. That's your, that's your family, that's your, who you're going to be, who your family's going to be. And I say that with all sincerity because that's what has to happen, otherwise you're going to remain underwater (?), okay? So, during that time we picked a board of directors, and we went to the national convention, which is in Washington D.C. We went to the national convention, and when you do that you learn a little bit, but then, you know, you start getting, you know, you start putting things together. And in 1963 I went to the march on Washington and, me and a number of people went to the march on Washington, and that was probably one of the greatest things that I've ever been able to take into effect.

Glen Payne, who was, Glen Payne was the president of the Bangor branch, and I was president of the Portland branch, we took a trip to Laurel, Mississippi, and we were going to take a truckload of books and clothes down to Laurel, Mississippi because Bangor had adopted Laurel, Mississippi as a branch, as a family branch. But at the last minute, whoever was going to let us use the truck found out we, "No, no, no, no, no, you ain't taking my truck down there." I mean, times were rough. And so we couldn't. But we did take a bus. And of course my family and everybody thought, well, you can't do that, I mean that's just a dangerous, dangerous thing to do. And at that time it's like, I got to do that, you know, I have to do that, that's something that has to be done. So you do that. I mean, those are the times, those are what the times are. And that's who you are, and of course you're younger and, you know, you have a feeling that I've got to do that. And that's, so him and I went down and spent either a week or two weeks down in Laurel, Mississippi.

And that also is part of your education, when you came back and you just, it just kind of rolled along, and you end up, what happens, I think, during that time is you challenge the chief of police, you challenge the city manager, you challenge the governor. Not just those things, but you're standing up for what's right, okay? And you're trying to get the Human Rights Commission, you're trying to get the, you know, a commission going, you're trying to get a rent legislation passed, you know, you're trying to do, because those are the things, things has to be, you can do, in other words, you've lived in a society that had done away with those things, and everybody else has them but you, you know, you've been denied them. You've been denied them.

And we went up to hear legislation on the Human Rights Commission, and we went up there, 1978 I think, 1968 I think, and legislation on housing and the Human Rights Commission. And first time we went up there, you know, here's our state legislature and, you know, we haven't been up there, I haven't been up there. And so you go up there and you try to do what you can, and you find out, you know, the first year or two years you fail, so you go back and you try it again. And, of course, a lot of people got together because they feel the same as you do, you know, and I can't speak for a lot of people but I speak for myself, you know, my ideas. And so they take part in that, and they wanted to be part of that because they knew they'd been getting along these years without that. But they want it, and that's their right, everybody's right, everybody else has it, why don't we have it. So that's what we do.

JR: I guess, I just kind of want to get a sense of the Civil Rights movement from your point of view and from the Maine point of view I guess. So first of all, in your community down in Laurel, Mississippi and in Washington, D.C., like what people do you remember most, and experiences, or if you have any anecdotes about your times back in the sixties.

GT: Well you always have to understand that you have to recognize and respect Martin Luther King, Roy Wilkins, John Lewis, you know, people that you hear, people that you see now that you didn't see before. Like we went all through school without reading anything about black history, and you know, you don't see anything about black people. You go all through school without seeing, you see pictures on the wall, but you don't see any pictures of black people on the wall so you have nobody to look up to that way. So, plus, you want to get closer to them, not closer to them as people, but closer to them in their attitudes and their being and their activity. You want to get close to them, you want to do that, that's what needs to be done. You know, So you do that. And you respect that. I want to hear, I want to see, I want to feel. And you do that because you're Black and you need, you have to have your rights, you need to have your rights. So you want to, so, as I said before, you just keep moving, you keep getting along.

Dr. Murph, who's a man that I met when I was in Laurel, Mississippi, we met, we got down there early in the morning, about five o'clock in the morning, he drove us around the city. And I've never been down in the south before, okay? And so we went to Laurel, Mississippi, come to find out, talk about Black and white, but that's the way it's community is. We went through the white section, which have tarred streets, sidewalks, street lamps, they have lawns, houses, everything. And then we went around the black community and they have shacks, no sidewalks. In other words, when you went from the street, which is dirt, when you went from the street to the house, you had to go over a plank or, you know, a step, you know, a step because there was a gully, a heavy (?) gully, you know. The streets were just dirt streets. No street lights. No street lights. Very few lawns. You know, I mean it was just a black and white kind of thing. And when we went over to his house, and we finally went to his house, and we had breakfast there with his wife, and I sat there and kept looking at the wall because he had a big, you know, plate window, and I looked at the black wall and I'm saying, "They must be really redoing their wall." And I kept looking at it, but something, you know, something, even though I had just graduated from Bangor High School not long ago, I was saying, something isn't right here. And I kept looking, and I said, "Dr. Murph, what are you doing to your wall?" He says, "About every other weekend they shoot out that plate glass window with guns," he says, "those are bullet holes." I moved my

chair. But it was very exciting, it was very, and very knowledgeable. Now let me tell you one more story, if you don't mind.

JR: Can I just switch the tape real quick?

End of Side A, Tape One
Side B, Tape One

JR: We are on Tape One, Side Two of the interview with Gerald Talbot. And you were just about to tell me another story about your times, but please.

GT: Well, this is one that has stayed with me. And that's when Glen and I was down in Laurel, Mississippi. Because you, as I said before, one of the things I want, I want to find out what's going on in the south, and I want to see that, and I want to feel that. Because you hear it and, you know, there's just a lot of things and you're one of those people. And while we were down there, I went to Dr. Murph, I said, "Dr. Murph, I want to go to a place where they refuse to serve black people." He says, "No problem," he says. "There's places like that here," he says. But what we do is we go to the Chamber of Commerce, and we go to a police department and tell them what we're going to do. I says, "Okay, when are we going to do that." So he says, "We'll do that in a couple of days." But we were out in the field working, you know, every day we'd go out in the field, working and trying to get people to the polls which was very, very hard because these people had to live there. You know, Glen and I and another load of people would come in and go back out. But these people lived there, so they knew what they had to go through and whatever. And you, in most cases you, well, I say most cases, all cases, you couldn't get in the city hall; they wouldn't let you in the door. You could not go in a city hall, even in the front door, they'd tell you that. Okay. So a couple days went by, and I'm saying, "Dr. Murph, I thought we were going to go in a restaurant." "Oh yeah, we'll get to the restaurant." But we didn't get to the restaurant. So finally I took it upon myself, I says, "Wait a minute, I'm going up to this restaurant myself," you know, after I found out what, where it was. So I asked another black girl who was working with us, and she said, "No, I'm not going there." She says, "No no, I'm not going there." And what happened, I found out, I come to the conclusion later on that she lives there, you know, there's a difference.

So I said, I'm going up there. So I went up there. I went up there and I sat down in the hotel, I mean, it was like a hotel, I can't remember now, but it was like a hotel and it had a restaurant. So I sat down in the restaurant and the waitress came by and she says, "Can I help you?" and I says, "Can I get some change?" Got me some change, brought it back. Hmm, "Can I get a cup of coffee and a piece of pie?" She went and got me a cup of coffee and a piece of pie. Either I've got the wrong place, or something's wrong. So I says, "Okay, can I get some more change?" "Yup," so she went and got me some more change. So when I paid my bill, I left. I went back to Dr. Murph, I says, "Dr. Murph, I thought you told me they wouldn't serve blacks." He says, "They don't." I said, "What do you mean they don't? They served me, I had a cup of coffee." And he starts laughing. I says, "Dr. Murph, what are you doing?" He says, "They didn't know you were Black." You know, because of the color of my skin. It never dawned on me. It never dawned on me. It just didn't dawn on me. So when I came home, after we came home, we drove a car back, after we came home, and the newspaper did an article. I sent that restaurant a copy of

that article so they'd know what they said, you know.

JR: That's great. So you went, during the Civil Rights movement you went down, like, did a lot of people like involved, specifically involved with the NAACP also go down to the south during this period? Like people from Maine and up north?

GT: Yeah. Yeah, different parts of the south, they went down on voter registration, because voter registration was a large part of what was taking place, that was an activity that a lot of people helped out. Not just from Maine, but because we were from Maine, and this is Maine, I mean, we're from Maine, you know, so we went down. It was something that we were very proud of being able to do, and doing.

JR: So that really helped people up in the northeast really get a sense of what the Civil Rights movement was all about.

GT: Oh, it was a whole learning experience. We not only learned that, but we learned what was going on, what had to be done or what needed to be done, and what we could do. But it also tied us in with people who were in the south, okay, and so it brought us together as a people. Not only black people, I say especially black, but normally black people, but black and white.

JR: What effect do you think, like, say like mass media had on, its influence as far as how people, like people who didn't go down to the south, your average, you know, most people up north east, how they would see what was going on in the south through mass media. How do you, like, did that have an influence on, like what was the influence of how it affected the people in the north, do you think?

GT: Well, the mass media I think had a big effect on people. Because sometimes they'd report things, and you can't see the other side of that. When you don't see the other side of it, that other side isn't there to see. So you have to take it upon yourself to find out what's going on, especially if you're in a leadership active role or whatever. You have to find out, because you can do that, come back, and give people back here a completely different story, completely different story. The mass media has a big effect on not only politics but racism, activities, that kind of stuff, so you have to be careful of that. And in some cases it's good, some cases it's not good at all.

JR: As far as in the U.S. Senate, with like the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, did you have much of a sense of how Maine senators like Muskie and Hathaway, in particular, how, what their stance on Civil Rights were and how active they were in that? Do you, did you have a sense of that?

GT: I think as a voter, as voters, I think we always kept up with that, or we tried to keep up with that. They were not only, say Muskie or Hathaway or Kyros, but they also had a vote, they had a vote on human rights and civil rights and those kinds of activities. So we kind of kept up, either reading the newspaper or listening to the newspaper, or going to a function that they were either at or will be at or whatever. So, because as I said before, what's happening out there, especially in the sixties and the seventies, okay, were the fact that this is your life. This is your

life. This is not only your life now, and who you are and what you are, but it deals with your children. In other words, where are they going to be able to go, how are they going to be able to on. So you sort of keep an eye on that. Sometimes you may not realize that, but that's what you do, yeah, that's what you do.

JR: What about probably more nationally known figures, like what was your sense of Lyndon Johnson's role, for example?

GT: Well, let me take Lyndon Johnson. When Lyndon Johnson first became president, and it wasn't an easy thing to do when we lost President Kennedy. But when Johnson became president we really didn't know what was going to happen to us. I mean, we just kind of feared that, uh-oh, you know, here's a man from Texas (*unintelligible phrase*). Because civil rights was the issue, civil rights was the issue. Okay, now I speak that as a black person, but civil rights was the issue, and everything that came was the civil rights issue. You know. And we were kind of worried about, uh-oh, where are we going now, or how are we going to do that, or what's going to happen. And it turned out, as time went on, he was one of the best things that happened to us, okay, with his civil rights record and whatever, and his stand for civil rights. You know, that's, I can't tell you about his stand on taxes, I can't tell you about his stand on, say, health care, but I can tell you something about his stand, or where he stood on civil rights, you know, and that kind, human rights. I can tell you that, but that's what I was mainly involved in. Even though he'd have some part of the other, you know, you either read it in the, like the mass media and whatever. But that's what you're interested in.

JR: And how would you compare Johnson with, like, Kennedy, like Robert and John Kennedy?

GT: Well I think there's a big difference, as everybody must understand. I think John F. Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy were the so-called bright lights. And they did what they needed to, could do, but they came from rich stock and whatever, and Catholic stock and whatever, but they were there and they did it. They, Kennedy was there when the same group, whether it was Whitney Young, whether it was Roy Wilkins, they met with them afterwards, after the Civil Rights march, they met with John F. Kennedy, you know, after. John F. Kennedy was there, you know, he had that bright light. I mean, he was something we could all look, it was something we could always look up to, and did look up to, and still look up to. And Johnson just came from another kind of a mold I think, you know, and he's out of Texas, you know, where things were not the greatest thing for Black people, you know. And he came out of Texas. Uh-oh, uh-oh, we're going to lose the bright star, or our hope, and we're going to go with Johnson, you know. And I said, whoa, wait a minute. So, it puts a feeling on where we are and what we're doing. Yeah.

JR: Okay. This might be a little obscure, but do you have any impressions of the Democratic National Convention in 1964, in Atlantic City?

GT: Nineteen sixty-four.

JR: Yeah, it was having to do with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party?

GT: Yeah, yeah. I had a little bit of a, we watched that completely over the wires, and we watched that, you know, that's another thing when you're active, you're active, you have to keep an eye on it, and we watched all of that. And they were denied the right I think to go into that convention, they were denied the right (?), so you watch that because that's what's taking place and you see that. So that's, we were involved in seeing what we could see and what we could feel and what we heard.

JR: Did that whole situation like kind of, for like maybe the Black community in general, or for the NAACP, did that kind of taint Johnson's image at all? With how, how he was kind of involved or didn't take such an active approach in trying to let (*unintelligible phrase*)?

GT: Well I think more or less, I think, from where I'm coming from, I think more or less it was a fact that what was taking place with the Democratic Committee, and with the Democratic stance and where they're going and that kind of thing. I think that's more or less where that took a, you know, took a hole off.

JR: Okay. I've been told that, were you also vice president of the New England NAACP?

GT: You found a lot of information. Yes.

JR: In 1968? Tell me about that, like people you met and like how it was different from your involvement with the Maine NAACP.

GT: Well, I was still involved with Maine NAACP, still involved with the Maine NAACP, but you know, if you get involved you get involved. And pretty soon people involve you for you because you meet people, you meet other people, and you just, you sort of grow, you grow. Let me give you an example. One of the meetings, or first meetings I went to dealing with the New England corpus (?), NAACP was down in Boston, Massachusetts. And we went down there, Neville Knowles, and, I and a couple people went down to that meeting. And we went to that meeting, it was down in, I think it was down on the corner of Mass and Columbus Avenues, the NAACP. And a woman was chair, she was chair of that meeting. Dr., I can't remember her name right now, Dr. something. Anyway, she was chair of that meeting, right. And I never was more impressed with a woman in all my life. Like, when you went in she'd see you, "Bam, down come the gavel, bam, you're out of order." And I looked and I'm saying, oh my goodness. I mean, I was just impressed. Not only with that but (?) for what I learned, and I didn't come back here at too long a time when I told my wife, "You better get yourself together. You're a woman, get yourself together." Because, and I told her about, what was her name, I can't think of her name, her name was, gosh, she's gone now, she's gone now. And, but we became good friends, you know, she was an educator, we became good friends. And, it was just something that, you know, every year we'd go down there.

And we had up here, I think it was 1968, we had the convention up here. The New England convention, that was the first time we'd ever had it in Maine. And it was because, you know, I was vice president or whatever. (*Unintelligible phrase*) how come you don't want to, you know, you don't go to Maine. You ought to go to Maine. We had them up here and we had a great

time, had a great time.

JR: What major people do you remember interacting with, specifically with the New England NAACP?

GT: Well, if you're involved with a branch in, say, Bangor, and I just put Bangor, that's the farthest you could go, in Bangor or Portland, whatever it was. And we're doing the same thing all over New England, you know. And we need to be in touch with one another, and we need that communication because what's happening in Boston, or what's happening in Burlington, Vermont, what's happening in Portland, Maine or Bangor, is a little bit different but it's along the same lines. So we've got to be in touch with each other. And we've got to be in touch with each other insofar as who we are and where we are. Bangor could invite somebody up to speak, I could, we could involve, you know, invite somebody here to speak, you know, that kind of thing, you know, you'd have to take that kind of thing into consideration.

JR: What was the, or what sense did you have of how the NAACP viewed the Vietnam War at this time.

GT: That's a good question. I think there's a lot of people that either, if you didn't, they didn't like the Vietnam War at all. But then there was other people who, you know, that's what we have to do, we have to fight a war, it's a war, or that kind of thing. So there's a lot of different feelings about the Vietnam War. That's a very controversial issue. It always has and it always will be a very controversial issue. And some people had their sons or daughters or fathers in the Vietnam War, active in the Vietnam War. Of if you got in contact with people, either here, they were stationed in Brunswick or whatever, and so that, you know, if you meet these people then you either become close to what's going on or what's happening or whatever.

But then we get back to the fact that we always see the news media. And news media where they're having a demonstration either in Washington, or they demonstrate in Portland, Maine, or they'll demonstrate, somebody says, well, you know, should I do this, can I do this, and do I want to do this, you know, that kind of thing. As far as know, as far as I realize, I don't think the NAACP didn't take a full stand against the Vietnam War, or for the Vietnam War. They haven't taken stands fully on political because they don't get involved with endorsing a candidate, you know, at least they haven't yet, you know, endorsing a candidate they stay with (?), that's left up to the individual, or individual members.

JR: Did Ed Muskie ever have any interaction with the Maine NAACP?

GT: I think he did, but maybe he doesn't realize it. And I say that because Ed Muskie was a senator, he was Senator Edmund Muskie, and he was also there in Washington, I mean in Waterville and that kind of thing. But he took a stand, and the stand he took with civil rights and human rights is something that touched all of us. And we knew that. That's why Senator Muskie was always a strong, I don't want to say being, but a strong person that we could depend on. We more or less could depend on him. And that was the best thing going for him, best thing going for us.

JR: Great. I just have like some specific people. Did you ever interact with Elizabeth Jonitis?

GT: Oh yes, oh yes, she's out of Lewiston. Yup, she's out of Lewiston. Oh yes, she was very strong. And we did have a number of meetings with her. In fact, I think she started off being president of the Lewiston branch of the NAACP.

JR: Yeah, I think so.

GT: Yeah, you know, and, yes we did. And she, and so it gets back to people who will take a stand. I believe in that, see, will take a stand and speak out. Makes a big difference, makes a big difference. And if you can do that, or if you find people in those kinds of roles, they are active not because they're trying to make money, not trying to, because they're trying to raise their name, but because things need to be done and have to be done because they're the right thing to do.

JR: Okay, and you also mentioned Neville Knowles, how were you, how was he affiliated with the NAACP?

GT: Neville Knowles was, is out of the Bahamas, and he moved here, he lived up in Lewiston, or up in Turner, then moved to Lewiston. And he and him and his wife (*unintelligible word*) started a beauty parlor up in Auburn, up in Auburn. He became involved with the Auburn branch up in Lewiston. Neville is a very quiet but active man. And then I guess, I can't tell you how long that was going on insofar as the shop was, then he moved to Portland, and when he moved to Portland he became ac-, he's been, he's always been active. So far as I know he's always been active, he's always been active. But he's like a quiet man, he's like a quiet man.

Let me give you an example. I worked at night for the Guy Gannett Publishing Company, went to work at six o'clock, and they had a very derogatory movie over in South Portland, and they were going to show it at the library. So I told my wife, "Fix my supper early and," I said, "because I'm going to get out of here early and I'm going over to South Portland, I'll put a stop to all this. I'm going to go in the city manager's office, because I don't like it." So I ate early, and just as I ate early, Neville come walking in, you know, he comes by because he was working out to Union Mutual, and he come by and he says, "I'm on my way and I just thought I'd stop by." I says, "Okay, Neville," but I said, "No problem," but, I says, "I'm in a hurry." Before I go to work I've got to shoot over to South Portland because, you know, they're going to show a movie over there." So Neville says, "Okay, that's no problem." And he says, well, he says, so long. So after I finished eating, I shot over to South Portland before I went to work. Went to the city manager's office. She said, "Well, city manager's in a meeting, he'll be right out." I says, "Okay," I says, "because my time is short and," I says, "I'm going to see him." About five minutes later the door opened. Out walks Neville and the city manager. "Neville, what are you doing here?" (*Unintelligible phrase*). But Neville and I were like that. I'd be going down a highway, going to a convention down in Boston or whatever, and I'd be going down and pretty soon a car would pull me over. And I'd say, what the devil's going on here. And it's Neville. Neville says, "I'll park my car, ride down with you."

JR: How about William Burney?

GT: Bill Burney out of Augusta. Now are you talking about big Burney, senior?

JR: Well, both, both.

GT: Well, senior Bill Burney was the president of the branch in Augusta, Maine. Okay, in Augusta, Maine. His son Bill Burney is his youngest son, but Bill Burney was always there in Augusta, and we sort of, and then we went like, like in the seventies, I was elected to the legislature in '72, but before, in that time, we'd have a meeting, instead of having a meeting like in Portland or Bangor, we'd have it right there in my office because it was centrally located. People in Bangor could get down there, people from central Maine, it was right there, and people from Portland would get there, so we'd have a meeting. And Bill Bernie was always there. So we could count on, Bill Burney was our strength in Augusta, or central Maine, Bill Burney was our strength. And in Bangor was Glen Payne, and in Portland there was, you know, it just ran on, you know, like I was and then I said, you know, well I got to move on and whatever, somebody else became president. Jamie Matthews became president, so he would come to Augusta and I was, because after I became a legislature I said, well I can't do both, or I shouldn't be doing both. I've got to do something else, or I got to get out of something else. There are other people to fill those holes, you know.

JR: Okay, if we can kind of talk about your time in the legislature. Before that, were you at all involved in the formation of the Maine Human Rights Commission in 1971?

GT: Yup.

JR: How, tell me about that.

GT: I was involved because Governor Curtis picked a number of us, and I can't tell you how many because I lose track of my thoughts up here, but he picked a number of us to do a study of human rights in the state of Maine, which we did. And we did, I think, the first one, and we did that, and one of them's that we have a human rights commission, because we had nobody to go to. As black people, we could go to a, on a porch, and they could say, "Get off my porch," either, you know, "Blackie, or nigger or colored, you know, I don't want you on there." We had nobody to go to. You can't go to the police department. There's nobody else to go to. We have to go to somebody, we have to have some kind of atmospheric organization that's going to give us some kind of help. Rightful help, not just, you know, just rightful help. So we did that. And we tried to get that passed. I think it failed the first time, and the second time it passed. And it went into effect in 1972. 1972 it went into effect.

JR: What made you decide to run for the Maine legislature?

GT: I decided to run for the Maine legislature when, I think what I was doing was I was trying to change course. Okay. That sounds kind of funny, but I was trying to change course. In other words, I had been involved for a number of years with NAACP and I was loud, I was vocal, and I was active. And I'm saying, wait a minute, I got to, you know. And then when we did change our presidents and whatever, it was no matter who was there, whether it was the newspaper or

television or whatever, whenever they did an interview or whatever with me, and I would say, now look, I represent, you know, something else, it was always NAACP. And I'm saying, "Man, how am I going to get away from this?" Because somebody else is involved, and I can't take their respect and their name away, I mean that's just not right. But whatever it was, it was always Gerry Talbot, NAACP, and I'm saying I got to get out of here.

So I decided to run for the Portland city council in 1971 and I was defeated on that. Of course, it was a political kind of thing, and I was defeated in that. And then we got together, there were about five of us got together, and what they were suggesting is, we should run for the legislature. And my first question to myself was, "That's crazy, you can't win for the legislature." I mean, not that it's never been done before, but you can't win. You can't run for the legislature. So I put it out of my mind. Put it out of my mind. I mean, this something that, it was such a statue that we just knew, we had not even thought about it. As people. And I kept thinking about that and I thought, "Well even if I don't win, I can make myself heard." I can go to places and, when you're invited as a candidate, you make yourself heard and that's what I'm interested in. That's what I'm interested in doing.

And it wasn't about a week, week and a half, before the nomination papers had to be in, we decided to run. There was Larry Connolly, Morse Beasley, and myself was going to run, as a kind of a team, we were going to run. And of course at that time we had a Democratic ticket and a Republican ticket, okay, two different tickets which we don't have any more. So we did, we got our names in. And at the last minute we were on the ballot. And they called me at the, when I was running the press, they called me and said, "We won, we were on the ballot." Now that's a big step. You're on a ballot, which means people are going to have to look at you and vote for you. So I took a look at the ballot, and I think there were twenty-one Democrats running, twenty-one, and they were in alphabetical order, and there were eleven or twelve Republicans. But I said, now look, the Democratic ballot, if I can put my history behind me, I know that people aren't going all the way down the twenty-one names, because the last person on the list was Millie Wheeler who was already serving in the legislature. And then me, so I'm next to last. You know, people who go to the polls are going to vote for like the top ten or the top eleven, we had eleven seats. But they ain't going way down to twenty and vote for somebody that's a loud mouth Black (*unintelligible phrase*). But I still did what I wanted to do; I made myself heard, Larry made himself heard. We raised very, very little money because it was something that we didn't like to do, but we made ourselves heard.

And, I'll never forget, we went, and of course then you could go to city hall and watch the counts come in. And the counts come in, and I came in tenth and I could not believe it. My family was there, the four girls were there, my wife was there, and it was like, I can't believe this. I mean, I don't believe this. I mean, you're going to tell me that I'm going to go to the legislature? Then all of a sudden things come into your mind. Like, you got to go to the legislature, the halls, you know, all that grand, all that, what do you call it, I'm trying to think of the word for the stairs and whatever. It's not cement.

JR: I'm drawing a blank too. Granite?

GT: Well, not granite, it's marble. All that marble, there's all that marble, I mean it's all that,

you know, top of the line kind of thing. I'm going there? You know? So I says, my God, you know. So you have to put that in effect. Then you have to put in effect, I have to put effect, what about my job? Because my wife kept telling me, you got to go down and see your job and tell them what you're doing. I says, no, I'm not going to do that. If I win, I'm going to do that. But if I lose, that's no problem. But, I says, I'm not going to go with that, I'm not going to do that. So I did, I went to my job. And I went and I said, instead of asking my boss, I'm going to go straight to the highest boss, because I'm not going to fool around. I'm going straight to the highest boss, tell them what's going on, I says, you know. So I did, I went to the highest boss, Mrs. Gannett, the one who owns the paper, I went to her. She congratulated me. But, little by little, she had me come all the way down the line, 'til I went right to my boss. She says, you got to go through this one, you got to go through, and they'd say, you know, and I ended right back where I started. So I told him and we made arrangements, and I said, you know, what time I have I'll come in but, and according to our contract I had to work at least five hours a night, at least five hours a night, you know, because that takes care of my insurance or whatever. Now, we're in the contract, you know, the union contract, whatever. So I says, that's no problem, I can do that.

So I did. Like I'd go up there, I'd start up there about seven o'clock in the morning, okay, then I'd come back. In my first term I'd come back like at six-thirty, oh no, my first term I'll come back about, sometimes a session would go until nine o'clock. I'd come back, and then I'd work. So I did that maybe for about, maybe three, maybe four hours sleep a night, you know, back and forth. And I, at that time I was younger than I am now, so I could do it, and I did it. And I took the kids up when they wanted to go. Whenever they wanted to go up I took my kids up there, and they were, you know, like the messengers and whatever, they did that. Or a minister, I'd say we need to get the Green Memorial (*unintelligible phrase*) church minister up there, give the prayer. In other words, I'd try to involve as many people as I could. Or if a fellow was out of work and he said, I've never been there. "Get up there, you come up with me and I'll feed you dinner and I'll show you the house, the senate, show you all around." And I'd do that because that's where, people, because I used to sit in the house and people would talk and look around, you know, I said, my father's never been here, he's not with us anymore, but my father's never been here. My mother was there when I got sworn in in 1972, and I'm saying, but they'd never been here before. I'm saying, man, this is a whole new world, a whole new world.

JR: Yeah, it really is. So you served three terms, if I'm not mistaken. And during that time, what committees did you serve on?

GT: I served on election laws and human resource committees. I served on those two committees the time when I was there.

JR: Okay. And do you remember what legislation you either sponsored or helped enact?

GT: Now you're really chonking my mind here, but that's okay. I, one, well, what we did in human resources, we dealt mostly with, at that time it was Indian bills, okay, dealing with the Indians' bills. It was a new committee and we dealt a lot with Indian bills, or we dealt with senior citizens. In other words, can they work after they get to be seventy years old and that kind of thing. And we dealt with some other kind of legislation. Of course legislation was always,

when the, legislation would come in and they would either throw it to one committee or another, which way should it go and you were willing to. . . Of course my first term I was not chairman of the committees, you know, I was not chair of committee. And then the election laws committee, election laws committees change like every year. I mean, they just have all different kinds of legislation. And in the second year I thought for myself, "How come I'm not chairman of the human resources committee? You know, I'm in the house, and everybody else is doing it, so why can't I do it?" So I did, I ran for it and I became chairman, I became chairman. But you had your different kinds of legislations.

One of the pieces of legislations, one of the first pieces of legislations that I sponsored was Martin Luther King holiday, I sponsored that legislation. I sponsored another piece of legislation to do with handgun control, because I think it should be controlled, you know, handguns. I don't buy handguns and whatever. I did that. There are whole stories behind all of them, but I won't go into that now. Another piece of legislation that Larry and I sponsored, which was, I think, was a major piece of legislation, was a gay rights legislation, so we sponsored that. And we went, the first year we sponsored that was a tough year. And there weren't too many people that helped support that. I would have, if we had something over the house here or whatever, I had them back me right up against my own refrigerator, telling me you can't do that, you shouldn't be doing that. Want to do it anyway, you know. Oh yeah.

Oh, I sponsored a bill dealing with equine infectious anemia. I was having dinner one night and a woman come in and she said, "I'd like to have you sponsor a bill for me." I says, "I'll sponsor anything you want because that's what I'm there for." Don't make any difference. I won't sponsor a bill and then put my name on the bottom and say I don't support it. That's not my job. They elected me to go the legislature, I'll sponsor it. So she says, "Can you sponsor a bill dealing with equine infectious anemia." I almost swallowed my fork. "What are you talking about?" She says, "Well it deals with horses, it deals with the red and white corpuscles of horses." And she explained the whole thing to me. Gave it some thought and I'm saying, "Here's what I'm going to do, here's the best thing for us to do, is that we'll meet every week, I will meet with you and your group, okay, and then you tell me all about equine infectious anemia and horses, and I'll tell you all about the legislature that you don't know. That way when we get down to brass tacks, I'm going to tell you, you know, what legislators to go to, or what lobbies to go to, that will help you or that you need to change their views on." So we came to that conclusion.

And I would meet with them every week, either in Portland, either in Westbrook or whatever, they had a group, I think mostly were women, you know. And we'd meet and they'd tell me about equine infectious anemia and horses, and how they could be killed, you know, because they were, I've just found out that they had equine infectious, so they, you know, then they would bar them from racetracks and whatever, you know. So I got that, and they got what I knew. And we helped, and we, and then we went to the legis-, we went to the hearing or whatever, and I bought a nice tie, and on that tie it had horses. And, but we won. And this was when James Longley was governor. And what they were going, and the agricultural commissioner didn't support it at all so they were going to kill it, they were going to kill that bill. And I thought to myself, they ain't going to kill it, they ain't going to kill this bill. So, and what I did find out is that I had to go to an NAACP convention, I don't know whether it was in

Tennessee or something, I had to go a NAACP convention. And it would pass and go on to the governor and was going to come back, because he was going to read it so we had to have a vote to override that. So I thought to myself, what am I going to do? So I put together a package maybe about a half inch stack.

JR: Half inch stack?

GT: Yeah, a package with all the very important issues. Not a whole lot of just ribaraw (?) but about the important issues of that. And then on the cover, on the cover of that, I found a picture of a horse, you know, the head of a horse, and his mouth was wide open. So I drew on top of that and I you know circled it in, it said, "Vote for me and I'll love you forever." And I put that on the top of this package. Took the package to the clerk of the house, Ed Pert, Ed Pert, and I says, "Have that passed out to everybody in the house," because that's where the bill came, you know, pass it out to everybody in the house, because you can do that. And he did that, because I said, "I'll be gone." And I told Larry, I'm going to give you a call to find out how that bill made out, I'm going to give you a call from where I'm at. So that was, a few days went by and finally I says, God, I got to give Larry a call. Gave Larry a call, he says, "My man, you won it again." I said, "Fine. We beat 'em again."

JR: I also read that you were involved with some legislation to rename certain places in Maine?

GT: You did a lot.

JR: I try, yeah. What can you tell me about that?

GT: This takes me back to the Portland Press Herald. And during a half an hour you get for lunch or whatever I'd go up to the library. They have a library down there, (*unintelligible phrase*), and I went in, I'd just go through some books and look at books and what's in this book or whatever. And I went to Pride of Maine or something like that, went to this book, it was a soft cover book right in there, but it's a book about maps. You know, I'm saying, well what am I looking at a book about maps for? And then all of a sudden a name caught me, Nigger. I said, whoa, hold it. And looked at, I found about seven of them, seven names, Nigger Brook, Nigger Hill, Nigger, and I'm saying, "Wait a minute, this book must be old, you know, like what's it doing here?" I looked at it, and it wasn't old. It was fairly new. And I'm saying, "Wait a minute, what's going on?" And this is before I become a legislator. And I'm saying, something's got to be done about this, this can't go on.

So I wrote to the mapping division at the state level and I asked them for a meeting. And we had a meeting, and I told them what I wanted, what I think and I want to find out about it. I never heard from them again. Then when I became a legislator I'm saying, look, I'm going to tell what needs to be done because they, you know, I mean that's something that And then I found out, as time went on I found out that there was a number of people on that committee who thought that was an historical thing and it shouldn't be changed, and that's the way it is. And I was saying, that's not the way it is. So I took it to the legislature. Come find out it's even a bigger thing to change than I realized, because you have change it in, you have to go to the

federal level, I mean you have, it's a federal thing, you know. And so I decided to change it. So we wrote up legislation and we changed that.

But then, it's not, if you're in the legislature it's not like you can say the sky is blue, and everybody's going to go with you. I don't care what you say, there's somebody coming up and say, the sky ain't blue. And that's exactly what happened. Because there was, I think there was a man from Westbrook, a representative from Westbrook, says well, "You know, what about Franco-Americans, you know, what about this?" So I had to go change it, and I had I think its a representative out of, I can't think of his name, representative out of Standish, he helped me change that. And we changed that legislation and it passed. And we only had one case, and that was up in Presque Isle I think, that wasn't going to change theirs at all, even though it was law. And they weren't going to change it because that's the way it is. And we almost had to take them to court. I went to the governor, and we almost had to take them to court, and I think they were going to take them to court until they changed it. Yeah.

JR: Yeah, I notice that you first proposed it like in 1973 but it took like four years to get passed. Did that have a lot to do with just like people wanting to honor the historic value of it?

GT: Well they, from the time I first went to the mapping division until the time I became a legislator and did that yeah, it was like, you know, a lot of committee, they didn't want to do anything with it. And a lot of the members, or I should say, a number of the members on that committee decided it's an historical event, I mean that's a historical name, so why are we going to change that, you know. So they didn't, and they didn't do anything with it, and it was my impression that you are going to change it. We're not going to have this. And because it was changed it was in, I think it was in *Jet* magazine, it was a national thing. I didn't realize that of course, but it became a national thing. And I think it happened in a number of other states, too, because I never knew that, you know, a lot of people in Maine never knew that those names were still there, and they were legal, they were legal names, you know.

JR: Okay, I'll just switch the tape.

End of Side B, Tape One
Side A, Tape Two

JR: Okay, we are on Tape Two, Side A of the interview with Gerald Talbot. And, we were just talking about your time in the legislature, and I kind of just wanted to go along with that a little further, and just kind of, what was your sense of while you were in the legislature like the political makeup, like the dynamics of the people who were there, like I don't know, how much detail you can go in?

GT: Well, there were a lot of different kinds of people there. There were, you know, men and women of course, we all know that. But there were some teachers, some doctors, some different kinds of people, made up of different kinds of people. And some people who thought, I would say, actively, and then there were some people that were very quiet. In other words, some people we'd go the whole session I didn't know who they are because they either didn't speak or whatever. And so you had, you know, like different people make up the whole legislature. You

had very, very few minorities. By that I mean, we had somebody from, at least a member that I know of from the Italian community; nobody from the black community. We had a couple members from the Jewish community and like that, so we had a different kind of a makeup and, yeah.

JR: And did you ever witness any tensions between, like whether there were regional clashes, or ideological or even ethnic, were there much tensions at the State House or - ?

GT: Well, I think for the most part, what I'd like to think of is, for the most part you had to, you had to treat everybody on an equal basis. Some people didn't do that. But you did that, I did that, and not to pat myself on the back, but that's the way I was brought up so that's what I treated. You had other people who had, who used common sense, and other people who used educational kind of sense. And there's a big difference, there's a big difference. And I had common sense and that's what, and I could sit there and I could just listen to legislation or whatever and just, say, you know, how come they haven't used common sense. Or I could get up and speak, using my common sense, and it would throw everybody off, you know, that kind of thing. So it was a different makeup.

Getting back, some people were politicians or played the political arena. Okay, in other words what I'm saying is, you had, every morning you had your report, okay, that came in to tell you what was going on for that day both in the house and the senate. But you also had the news about what took place the day before, okay? And so, and then you had that every day, you got that in a newspaper. And, so sometimes people would just, and people who spent time living in Augusta knew that, because that's what they studied. Now me, I had to travel back and forth every day, I had to travel back and forth. Which wasn't a benefit for me in the long run because I, you know, by the time I get back I can't, in other words, when I get up (?) in the morning those other people were ahead of me, they were ahead of me. So when a piece of legislation come up, I say this as an example, when a piece of legislation came up sometimes they voted against you, or because, or they voted with you because of how you voted on their bill, you know. In other words you're going to look up and see (*unintelligible phrase*) the roll call vote and say, "I wonder why they voted against me," you know. And after that well you might say (?), they'd say well if you read the roll call this morning, you know, from yesterday, you been voting against me for a while.

And so you had to more or less learn your way around, or learn your way of who's who. Or, you learned to respect people for different things. You really respect everybody. You learn to respect people for, in other words if a bill came up dealing with a portion of a tax bill, I would look on the roll call vote to find out where this person voted. In other words, like if it was like Larry Connolly, now Larry Connolly's not with us any more, but Larry Connolly's the one that went with me to the legislature. But if it dealt with low income, I knew there was nobody in that house that knew low income legislation like Larry. So what he voted, I voted, if I didn't know, if I didn't know. Or if somebody had a tax issue or whatever, you know I would vote, I would follow that.

The only time that Larry didn't follow me, okay, well I shouldn't say not only, but the one time that I know Larry didn't follow me was close to the last session. We went for, what do you call

it, we used to, we represented the whole city, but then we went to legislation that dealt with districts, okay, and I was against that, I never voted for that. But Larry voted for it, and I voted against it. And after that session was over he came to me, he says, "Gerry," he says, "how come you voted against it?" I says, "How come you voted for it?" He says, "I voted for it because I live in a low income district," he says, "we're always going to have some people here from that district." I says, "Larry, let me tell you something. I'm black, and I'm from a district, and I got elected to the legislature because I was able to count on other blacks throughout the city, low-income people throughout the city, other friends throughout the city. If I go into a district, I'm out of here." "You know, you got a good point." Because, I said to Larry, "Your district could change, your district could change. You're in that low income district now, but that could change." "You got a good point there." So he went with me, he went with me, but I mean, you know, we lost that and that's the way it's been ever since. But I mean that's, so that's another thing that you, you learn your way around there.

JR: What other people do you remember that had an impression on you, like in your time in the legislature, like other legislators?

GT: Oh I think, this is another Gerry Conley from Portland, had an effect on me. He was in the senate. He had an effect on me. I think that John Martin, who was speaker of the house, had an effect on me. He became speaker. But for me, I still think John Martin was the smartest one I know. Now, there may be some people that don't agree with him, but he, and him and I got into some arguments, but I had a lot of respect for him, what he knew and how he knew that, you know. There was Mary Najarian, out of Portland who went there with me, and she did the best she could. I mean I could go through people that you just know and just, you had respect for, you know. And you end up, more or less, I had respect for a young man, and I can't think of his name now, see, I have problems with my memory. But he was, what's his name, well we sponsored a bill dealing with gay rights and we went to the hearing, and there was nobody that wanted to, that, I shouldn't say wanted, that testified against us. We took the whole meeting. Except, somebody left our meeting and went down and got him, brought him back, and he testified against us and has been against it ever since. A big man. But him and I had a good relationship. And I think we all, he differs and I differ on that particular point, or any point, but I respect him. I have to have respect for him. You know, we differ on points but I have respect for him. So that's, you had that kind of thing, you know. And that's one of the things that I enjoyed about the legislature is you meet people, you know, you meet Libby Mitchell, who was speaker of the house, I had a lot of respect for her. It's just, I can just go on and on and on.

JR: I have a couple I wanted to ask you about. Do you remember Carroll Minkowsky?

GT: Yes.

JR: Yeah, he was from, I think he was senator from Lewiston.

GT: He was a good senator, he was a good senator. There's a difference between the house and the senate, there's a difference. The house is always active, the senate's very quiet. You know what I'm saying, I don't know if I'd ever run for the senate, you know. I don't mean to get that wrong now, but I mean that's the, but yeah, I remember Carroll. And he was a good, and he

had a good personality, I think he had a good personality. And so we always, you always say hello to him, you always are good to him (?). And the reason why I say that, you always know where places in the state are. That sounds kind of funny. But you say, well I'm going to, oh, I don't know where it was, say someplace in Aroostook county, say. I know that because so-and-so represents it. You know, you learn because the people are from there or because the speaker says, the chair recognizes Gerry Talbot from Portland, or the chair recognizes somebody from Presque Isle, or the chair recognizes somebody from Fort Kent. You kind of get an idea where things are, places are, you know, oh yeah, yeah.

JR: Did you have any interaction with Ed Muskie during your time with the state legislature?

GT: I had a little interaction with Muskie. More or less because I supported Muskie and, you know, all the way through as many times as, I've been to polls every time I've had the chance. But during the, especially during the Indian Land Claims legislation that was there. Muskie came there, Senator Muskie came there and talked to us, and he talked to us in the house, and we listened and I'll never forget him saying that, he says, and we, and I was for the Indian Land Claims, I wanted to support that. A number of people wanted to support that. And I remember him saying to us, "If you see twenty million dollars as a lot of money, go to Washington." He says, "Go to Washington," Washington, D.C. he says. And I'm saying, man, that says it all, you know. We're dealing with something that needs to be dealt with, and, you know, decisions made, and he was. And then we went and had lunch with him, a group went and had lunch with him. And so, but he was very respectable, yeah.

JR: What was your sense of like, how did other people in the legislature view him? Was that like a general feeling, that everyone really respected him or - ?

GT: I think so, yeah. That would be my impression, that everybody more or less respected Senator Muskie because, as I said before, Senator Muskie was, it wasn't just Senator Muskie, it was Senator Muskie because he was so strong, okay. In other words, he was a strong, I don't want to use force, because that's kind of an offset word, but a strong, as the old timers would say, he was a beam. In other words, he held everything up, you know, he was a beam and you could depend on that and that was just strong, you know, that kind of stuff.

JR: What can you tell me about some more research I did, about Black Educational and Cultural History Incorporated?

GT: I started that in 1980, I started that. I was, I think I tried to, you know, either change course or do something along the same lines as I do in my work, because for a long time, even when I was in the legislature, I collected a lot of black history and whatever, and was trying to write a book, never got around to doing it because I was always too busy doing something, and other people are too busy doing something. But I always collected like things, like letters, and I collected artifacts and whatever I could pick up and whatever. And then what I would do is, because we don't have it in the state, you don't have it in school, you don't have it anywhere. So I figured that's the way to do it. So that's what I would do, and I have three floors, or I have two rooms on my third floor, and I collect all my posters, you know, I never throw away posters or anything.

And what I would do is I would go around to churches, schools, universities, college or whatever, and set up like, if they asked me, they would ask me, invite me, set up two tables or three tables and then I would just set everything out. And I would, so that's what I would do, and I'd get involved in the schools or the classes would come by and they'd say, they'd never seen it before. You know, I had busts, they were about eight inches high, a bust of Benjamin Banniker and Charles Richard Drew, and like that, and I had the like slave chains and whatever, and pictures, whatever I could put together or frame I would do that. And even the teachers didn't know, you know, they (*unintelligible word*) do that.

So in 1980 I thought, I got to find another way to put things together. And I did. And then I spent probably a lot of one, most of one night here just trying to figure, well who am I going to be. In other words, how's it going to be, it can't be just Gerry Talbot, it's got to be something, you know, because I've got to go to the state, see if I can't get incorporated or whatever. So I kept writing down things, and I said, well black education is what I've been doing, and cultural history is what I am so I just, plus that spells BEACH, B-E-A-C-H. So I says, you know, that's easy and it's best if I went, I went to Black Education and Cultural History. And I went to the legislature, no, wait a minute, don't get me wrong, I went to a lawyer which was Fred Williams whom I knew, he was a good friend of ours, and I went to him and I said, I want to become incorporated so that I'd be, because then you become almost like legal, you know. And a lot of stuff, a lot of information that comes to the state, people don't know where to send it, or don't know who it should go to. Or newspapers or television or whatever don't know who to call, or don't know where to go, you know. And so I says, "I want to become legal." And that, so we did that, so I did that and I'd have cards put up, so I became Black Education and Cultural History. So that was when I, if I was down I took the exhibit down to city hall, or I went down to the Portland public library or wherever I went to, even up to the State House, then I could just give out a card or something that says, you know, you want to know who I am or you want to give me a call, here's my card. So that was like that (?).

JR: Great. I also understand you were a member of the Board of Visitors at the Edmund Muskie School of Public Service?

GT: Yes.

JR: What can you tell me about that, like the school and like the board?

GT: Well they, I've been a board member since 1990 I think, they asked me to become a board member and I said, yes, I will. In other words And I've been involved in a lot of things, because either no other blacks were involved or needed to be involved and whatever. But the Muskie Institute, I thought geez, you know, that's an educational kind of thing and that's a big thing (?), I mean it's something that really means something, not only to the community but to the state and to education. So I says, I'll do that, I mean I'll become a board member. So I have, I become a board member and I go to board meetings. Some board meetings like a lot of people, some board meetings I can't make or can't get to, but I learn a lot, too, because you're sitting there with other people and you learn a lot. And of course education is something I still need to learn a lot about, you know, geez, I mean, you know, I don't have a lot of education but I, you

know. But, and I've been able to, hopefully I've been able to, you know, contribute some things to the Muskie Institute. I've met his son, his son Ned. And, you know, sometimes we sit down in a meeting or we have the meeting, it's usually a two day meeting, we go to a lunch, like a, not a dinner but a, like a luncheon, or evening luncheon at night, either on a Tuesday or Wednesday or whatever, and then we go to the meeting at the law school on the next day and we spend time, most of the day but not all of the day at the meeting, and we talk about different kinds of things and whatever. Yeah.

JR: So what's the function of the board, just like the basic -?

GT: Well, the function of the board is that we make sure, or we ask questions or we try to facilitate questions about, you know, where the board's going, how it's going, where the university is going, how the Muskie Institute's going, what it should be doing, how it should be doing, what studies they're doing, how many people are involved, the involvement, where the money's coming from, that kind of thing. So that takes place during the meeting.

JR: And who else do you serve with on the board?

GT: Pardon?

JR: Who else is on the board?

GT: Oh, my goodness. Of course I can't remember names now. John Jenkins' is on the board, and I'm on the board. There's another young man that's been on the board, his, he's, oh God, there's another young man that's on the board that, and I can't think of his name, you got me with names. But, oh, there are a number of people. And of course sometimes they change. Yeah, they change. What's his name, Lee, Lee the car dealer.

JR: Oh, Shep Lee?

GT: Shep Lee, Shep Lee is on the board. And, oh God, Woodbury, he's on the board, I think he's still the chairman of the board. Woodbury. Woodbury, Woodbury. Plus there's a couple people from Washington, D.C. that come up for a meeting. And we just have a good time, we have a good time. I mean, not a good time during the meetings, but a good time just saying, you know, what's going on in Washington, D.C., or what are you doing down in Washington, D.C., you know. And sometimes I feel like, well, you know, maybe I should just get myself one of those, you know, big thick briefcases or something so I could just say, "Wait a minute, I'm here at a meeting today," you know. I mean, I'm just kidding you, don't get me wrong.

JR: And you mentioned that, so you're still involved with the NAACP pretty much?

GT: Not as much as I was, not as much as I was. I'm not as much involved, I'm still involved, but not as much as I was. I started getting away from that. Then I think about maybe, I would, say five years ago, I think I took the impression that they weren't doing what they should be doing, or how they should be doing it under new leadership. And I said, the best thing for me to do is just get away from it, because I've got so many other things to do. Well, I shouldn't say

that, I should say that I've got to concentrate on some other things. And I'm now in the process, me and another woman, are now in the process of writing a book on Black history in Maine. And that's what I think I had mentioned to you earlier that I was trying to do but I just didn't have time or wouldn't take time to put my, but now I've got to do that. So I've given up just about all of the different organizations that I was in, or that wanted to get a, you know, a piece of your activity because I can't do that, because, you know, it just takes a lot of your time, a lot of your energy, and a lot of your reactions to how you're going to put this, where you're going to get this information, research that, so that's what I'm into now, and that's my main interest right now.

JR: With whom are you doing this?

GT: Pardon?

JR: Who are you writing the book with?

GT: I'm writing the book with a woman by the name of Harriet Price. Now Harriet Price was, while I was in the legislature she was up there, she was working for the U.S. Commission of Civil Rights and whatever, whatever. She's been, and she wrote a book on blackberry season, and so she's kind of a writer. She's more of a writer than I am, there's no question about that. And then I'm more of a Black historian than she is, so we put both of those together. And it wasn't until we were at a meeting, or a banquet, at the Abyssinian church, they had a banquet there and we sat together and we started talking and I'm saying, "Geez, I didn't know you when you was up there, well I didn't know you when you was up there." See, our paths crossed but we never got together. So we sat, and so we, as we talked we thought we'd be, well why don't we get together. This was about two years ago, two and a half years ago. Why don't we get together and find out what we're doing. So we did, and we've been meeting ever since, yeah.

JR: You mentioned What specifically is the N-, you've mentioned that you kind of steered away from the NAACP, what is it that they're not really doing that you think they should be?

GT: Well I think, I think, from my own point of view, and I don't mean to be putting anybody else's attitude in here, but what I think I should doing is, what I think is that it should be more active. In other words, we can't, or we shouldn't be just saying we're going to have a banquet this year, you know, and then we'll have one next year. Wait a minute, hold the phone there, we got all kinds of things that we should be involved in, that we should be involved in now. And maybe some of them don't look like a racial issue, but we should make a stand anyway. In another words, there's a lot of shootings in our schools. Where's our role? Where's our role? We should be involved in that. Where's our role insofar as going to school, for saying, wait a minute, I've been all through the school, I haven't seen a picture of a Black person on the wall. What's going on?

I mean, so there are different things that we should be involved in that we're not involved in on a regular basis, that we should be involved in and be active in. We should be active so that a lot of people within the community, not just black people, black people, white people, should be saying I want to become a member of that. I mean there's, you know, there's our health, there's

our old age. I mean, you know, we want to make sure that when people, or black people, go to a home or go to a hospital they're taken care of, or somebody's there to make sure they're being taken care of. "Everything right, is everything right here, you being taken care of?"

You know, in other words, it's not just a racial kind of thing where you call (*unintelligible phrase*) problem, we do something about it. No, no, no, no, no, wait a minute. In other words, I think where I'm coming from is from the sixties times have changed. So our attitude also has to change, so we have to do some things differently. That's like saying, when I came up in the thirties, times have changed. Times have changed, you know, so we have to change along with that. So unless we do that, then we sort of, you know, we stay stagnant. We're there, but we don't do what we need to be doing, you know. And, so plus, like I say, I've got to be doing some things, I've got to, I'm involved in the underground railroad now, as I have been for about three years, two years, I don't know. You know, in the state of Maine, up in Brewer, Maine and, with a book, and those are very important to me, yeah.

JR: Okay. What can you tell me about the African American archives that you helped establish at USM, like what, how did you decide to do that?

GT: Well, in 1995, because one of the things that I did, is I loved taking my exhibit or whatever to schools, as I said before. But one of the things that I think bothered me was the fact that, what if we have smoke damage, or what if we have a fire. All that history is gone, or all of it's destroyed. Some of it's worth some things, there's no question about that, and some of this needs to be there for educational purposes. And then I came to the conclusion, it's got to go somewhere. Plus, I'm getting older. My kids don't want all that stuff. And my wife keeps, you know, my wife, you know, or I have visitors here who say, "What are doing with all that junk?" And I'm saying to myself, well, I've got to do something with it. Not that it's junk, but I got to do something with it. So I says, well, what do I do with it.

Well, it's got to go someplace, and it's got to go someplace, it can't go down, or it shouldn't go down the Maine Historical Society because they've got stuff they haven't even know they've got. But they do a fabulous job. If it's up the University of Maine up in Orono, it's like too far away. And Portland is the largest city. Bates College has their own exhibit, and so does Bowdoin, and they're away from the population. And the population in Portland is changing. So what about the University of Southern Maine, I mean, you know, we have the largest population, sixty-four thousand people. It's changing, there are more people here, and the university's growing, you know. I thought about that and I'm saying, well, maybe they will, and maybe they won't even take it. I don't know. I mean, this is another first, I never been through this before.

So I called and I got a meeting with them, and they wanted to talk with me. And I says, "I'll talk with you." And they talked, and we sort of come to an agreement, and I says, I'll give it to you. You know, in other words, I'm not out to sell you something, you know, I'm out to give it to you. I'm interested in people getting an education. You know. And this was a, and so if you take the information, other people get the information and it's something for everybody, you know. That was my, and it still is, my main purpose. And they said fine. So I worked with them, I worked with President Pattenaude, Rick Pattenaude, and I worked with another woman over there, and we got a man.

And finally after we settled things up, they sent a young man here to, you know, to get things together. But one thing I didn't realize that they have to go through every paper, you know, every poster, you know what I'm saying. And, you know, they had to go through every one of them, and they spent like two, three weeks here just doing that, right. Which is important, but I didn't realize that, you know. And so he did that, and he carried out about twenty-five boxes of stuff out of here, yeah, about twenty-five boxes out of here. That was in 1995. And then they presented me with some papers, when we went to Augusta, you know, thank you this and, you know, and everything went, I took my family there and whatever, whatever, you know.

And then they gave me, 1995, yeah, 1995 they presented me with, at graduation, they presented me with a Doctor of Humane Letters graduation. And, you know, I was saying to myself, I can't believe this, I can't believe this, you know. Four times I quit as a senior in high school, and, I mean, I can't believe. I mean, it was, I was so honored by that. And then when graduation time come and I had a, you know the black robe and a hat, "I'm saying, I ain't going to make it, I'm going to get lost, or I'm going to, something's, a car's going to come down the street and hit me. I'm not going to make it." And I went to graduation, it was just a very, very important time in my life. And I have it hanging on my wall so that my grandchildren will look at it, they'll see it, people will come in and will see it and say, I mean just, you know, it just means something, you know.

JR: Great. Just kind of to wrap things up a little bit, over the course of all the time you've lived in Maine, what are your impressions of how it's changed, say politically, for example, just like from when you were younger to like when you were in the legislature and to now. What's your impression of that?

GT: Well I think there are two ways to look at it. I think it has to change but I think there needs to be a lot changed. Now, let me go through one, and that is I think it has changed a great deal because now we not only find people working in the mall as cashiers, you find them working at the airport behind the counters, we were finding them working in the banks as bank tellers, we are now finding blacks in the law office, or their own law office. We find blacks who have, work in the police department, we now have a black in the fire department in Portland. In the legislature I was, you know, I was in the legislature, young Bill Burney was on the city council in Augusta. He then became mayor of the city of Augusta, John Jenkins was mayor of Lewiston, then he went to the senate. I'm trying to use my memory here, Fred Williams was, I think he was a, well you know, a black, one of the first, I say one of the first black lawyers that we had in the state of Maine. Down in Old Orchard Beach I think there was, what's his name, Cummings, Cummings was a member of the city council down in Old Orchard Beach. I'm trying to remember his name.

JR: Is it Glen? No.

GT: No, no, there was a number of Cummings, but his name was, I can't remember the first part of his name. And, but he's a member of the city council down there. And so there are a number of, and I think there's, so in other words, there are a number of blacks who are going to run or have run for the legislature or for, you know, different posts. Jill Duson is chairman of the

school board here in Portland, another Black that originally served on the city council in Portland. So that's changed, that's changed a great deal because remember that all the time I came up, why, that didn't happen at all. In fact there were blacks, two blacks that I know of in Bangor that was refused a job on the police department, you know, and you couldn't find them, I mean they were there, or whatever. So there are two different sides.

Now, getting back to the other side of that, I think we've still got to go a distance, and that is because we still have racism in the city of Portland, in the state of Maine, and there are a lot of people that don't like to see racism or hear of racism but don't understand what racism means or that kind of thing, but we still have it. Whether that's in the news media, whether that's, wherever it is that's still with us, we've got to do something about it. The schools, the school children, I shouldn't say children, don't get me in trouble. The school teenagers that are in school are getting together on diversity, putting diversity together, putting diversity together insofar as other countries are concerned, you know, that kind of thing, so that's good for us. So in a way we're doing a lot, but there's still a lot to do. But then you have to, again if you look at, we've come up from a long distance, like over two, three hundred years, we've come a long distance. So everything isn't going to be right like overnight, it's not going to do that. So it's come a long distance, and we've got a long distance to go. But we still work on that. All of us.

JR: Now I guess I'd just like to ask you, in reference to Muskie, Ed Muskie, just like an overall impression of him, like of the times, of the times you interacted with him or the stories you've heard about him, what you know about him, like what can you give as an impression of him?

GT: Well I think you can always give his strength. He had, and I think still has strength insofar as people are concerned, the issues are concerned. How he stood. He was always strong, strong, he was always tall, he was always erect insofar as the issues were concerned. Whether that was down in New Hampshire where he stood and he cried. He did it because he's human, and he has feelings, and you can't take that away from him, you can't take that away from that man, you know. And so, but he was there, and he wasn't ashamed of that. And we're not ashamed of that to who he was and what he is, and who he is today. And he has a university, he has a program, and we support that because we can't, in other words we can't, because he's not with us any more, we can't forget that and say, well, he's not with us any more, we'll just forget that. Can't do that, you can't do that. We must just keep that right on going, keep that right on going because that's good for our educational system, and when I say that I mean our education system which means us as people, us as people. And we learn from that. And if we learn from that we become a better society, and we better, if we become a better society, then Muskie still has a better smile on his face.

JR: All right. Is there anything else that we've neglected to discuss? Or not?

GT: I don't know, I'm still very, very proud, you know, to serve on the Muskie board, and I'll still be here. And then when they need somebody else to take my place over they'll tell me. And, I enjoy it, I enjoy talking with, you know, Nicole.

JR: Nicole?

GT: Yeah, who's on the board, who's on the (*unintelligible word*) with you.

JR: Oh, Andrea, Andrea L'Hommedieu?

GT: No, no. Let me -

JR: Don Nicoll, yeah, sorry.

GT: He lives right up here.

JR: Right. Right, right.

GT: He lives right up here, and I just, you know, when we go to a meeting or whatever and I see him I know everything is fine, everything is, you know, sturdy. You know, yeah, so I enjoy that.

JR: Great, so anything left out about yourself or what you've done or . . . ?

GT: You don't want to hear any more about myself. Geez. No, I think, me, I've been very, very involved in doing a lot of things. But now it's just time, I'm retired, retired in '91, I'm retired, and I enjoy that very much. But I'm still busy doing, you know, some things that I want to do and need to do, like that. And so I'm, I feel very good about it.

JR: Great. One question (*unintelligible phrase*), are you any relation to Sharon Talbot?

GT: How did you find out her name?

JR: Oh, she used to work for Muskie.

GT: That's exactly right. That's my daughter.

JR: Is it?

GT: That's my daughter.

JR: Oh, okay. Yeah, because we were -

GT: She works for, she worked for Senator Muskie in 1978. And that was the year, that was my last year that I was in the legislature, she worked for Muskie, her and Merton Henry's son. Well no, I shouldn't say that, well they worked for there but I have a pic-, one of the pictures that I gave the archives is Sharon, and Senator Muskie was standing in the middle, and Merton Henry's son was standing on the side, and he autographed that for her. That's out at the, that's one of the pictures out at the university, yeah. Nineteen seventy-eight, she was, I remember this one, she was a sophomore at Smith College in Massachusetts, yeah.

JR: Okay, yeah, because we'd actually like to interview her if we can, if we might be able to

get her address from you?

GT: Oh sure, you can interview.

JR: Yeah, and send a letter to her if we can get in touch.

GT: I was going to say, if you want to interview her you better get a plane ticket.

JR: Oh yeah? Where is she?

GT: She's over in Holland.

JR: Oh, Holland, oh really?

GT: Tell them you want to go over there in Holland.

JR: Yeah, I could do that, it would really be great.

GT: Yeah, she's over in, just outside of Amsterdam, Holland.

JR: Really, like permanently, that's where she's living?

GT: She works over there in a computer company and (*unintelligible phrase*). Her and her husband have started up their own computer company, and she married a man that is from Holland, or from The Netherlands, and she married him and they live over there, they went over there, I would say, I can't remember because it's, see, I had an awful bicycle accident and I lost a lot of memory and whatever, and she went over there the day after I had that bicycle accident. Her mother said it was okay to go over there. But it was, it had to be like five years ago, I think it was like five years ago. And she's been home twice I think, or three times. But she's over there, yeah, yeah.

JR: Okay, all right.

GT: And you can always get in touch with her.

JR: Okay, I might try to do that. Is there anyone else that you can think of that we might want to interview, like either involved with the NAACP or people that you know who were involved with Muskie, or anything else?

GT: I'm trying to think who, I think the trouble is when you do that you can't think of anybody.

JR: Yeah.

GT: The minute you get out the door I'm going to think of ten people.

JR: Yeah, because Neville Knowles, (*unintelligible phrase*).

GT: Neville Knowles is, works at Bates College.

JR: Yeah, yeah, that's what I thought.

GT: Yeah, yeah, he's down to Topsham. I was trying to think who, well you might want to get in touch with, say, like either Mary Najarian or Gerry Conley or, I mean there's so many people you can get in touch with. I'm trying to think of who else was, or Joe Brennan.

JR: Yeah, we, I don't know, I don't think we've interviewed him but we probably want to, yeah.

GT: Yeah, because I remember them being together down at the, we was all together down at the Eastland Hotel I think when, was Joe Brennan running, yeah, no, I think, yeah, I think it was him, either him or presidential campaign. Oh who was that, can't think of his name, but anyways. I'm trying to think of somebody else. I'll think of, as I think of somebody I'll let you know. I've got your number.

JR: Yeah, that'll be great, if you can drop some names for us, that'll be great. All right, well that's it. I think I'm all set.

GT: Oh, this has been my pleasure, geez, I enjoyed it.

JR: Thank you this was

GT: I appreciate, I enjoy sitting here running my mouth, but I mean, you brought back some memories and you, that's been good, thank you, I thank you.

JR: Thank you, right.

End of Interview